

A Defense of Jazz

By FRANK J. SULLIVAN.

YOU would die laughing if you could read the 563 newspaper clippings spread out before your correspondent on this desk, all over the ash tray on which no ashes may be dropped and right in front of the hand painted candle which under no circumstances may be lighted. Your correspondent lives at home.

The clippings all relate to jazz. They belong to the files of a certain newspaper and contain everything that has been said about jazz by everybody from Bee Palmer to Rabbi Wise. Yes, you would die laughing.

You may well ask: "With so many fresh (in the sense of new or recent) newspapers to be had for tuppence or thereabouts how comes he to be reading this ancient journalistic chow chow?"

The impulse derived originally from a pain in the neck.

Your correspondent lately took up, in the waiting room of a well known prescription specialist, a copy of a highbrow magazine. In it there was an article popping jazz. In words that never weakened to the extent of less than three syllables, save in the unavoidably monosyllabic consonants, conjunctions and articles, it endeavored to give the impression that jazz is absolutely and unutterably bla. Jazz was not music, it was vulgar, it was sensual, it was discord, it was this, it was that.

If Sophie Tucker or Paul Whiteman had read that article they would have cried their four eyes out, and it was to avert just such a calamity that your correspondent went out immediately, without the prescription, and bought up and burned every copy of that periodical. No ophthalmia for Sophie Tucker if your correspondent can help it!

Knocking Jazz Is Popular.

That article, then, was the straw that broke your correspondent's back and then gave him a neckal pain.

Why must they pick on jazz?

I mean jazz in its broader application, which might take in pretty nearly the entire modern movement, including the shimmy. You would have four or five general subheads, in Roman numerals. One of them, of course, would be the flapper. And then under her would be (a) bobbed hair, (b) cigarettes for women, (c) short skirts for ditto, and so on. Under the short skirts you would have a sub-subhead in small Arabic numerals, as (1) rolled down stockings. And so on. It gives you an idea of how you could go about it if you were writing a thesis. It also gives you an idea of how much the jazz movement really includes.

In the kingdom of jazz as it now exists elements like Ted Lewis and Gilda Gray and the dance called Chicago are only drops in the bucket. Why there are even jazz preachers to-day, whether they know it themselves or not.

Looking at it from all of the 872 sides which every question has, can you see how things could be any different to-day? Can you see that there is any more danger of jazz ruining the country than there is of a high (low?) tariff ruining it, or open face goloshes as worn by co-eds, or Ed Wynn's jokes or almost anything else you could think of and a lot of things you wouldn't? We will not speak of the war because of the fact that it is over. Some time ago the writer was sent to northern Labrador by the Society for Practical Research to investigate and report on the causes for discontent among the Crustaceans of Labrador. This was when he was at the age of 12 and he was gone two days and two nights, Labrador time, or seven years and four months, New York daylight saving time.

Returning last night unexpectedly he found that jazz had arrived during his absence. You may well imagine his surprise.

The first thing the Pullman porter who took his valise and velocipede said was:

"Cav' y' baggage suh? Jazz is ruinin' de morals ob dis country, suh!"

Your correspondent believes that is a fairly accurate transcription of the Afro-Harlem dialect.

The taxi chauffeur in front of the Grand Central Station said:

"Taxi! Hiyooahair! Jazz was invented by a demon!"

The hotel clerk said:

"Sorry. We have nothing left under \$19, but it might interest you to know that the Massachusetts Society of Chiropodists, at its last annual convention, denounced jazz as causing warts on the feet."

As a scientist there was nothing for the writer to do but find out about jazz on his own hook.

Hence it was that nightfall found him in what is commonly called a palace of jazz. The partitions separating three ex-saloons had been torn down, and then joined with the respective back rooms, or family entrances, until the ensemble presented quite a sizable palace for jazz. The whole was hung with heavy silk Arabian draperies, in blue and yellow stripes a foot and a half wide. The lights were dimmed in order to confuse Federal agents. The waiters were dressed as sheiks, presumably also to confuse the agents. The entire effect was as immoral as a plate of pork and beans.

Then little Jessica came along. Before leaving for Labrador your correspondent had known Jessica as a little girl who had dandled him on her toes when they were partners at dancing class.

It might be remarked here (and the whole situation may take from the remark a tinge of humor that is perhaps excusable and even desirable in a serious treatise like this) that your correspondent cannot dance. In fact, if he may say so, he has been decorated by His Majesty the King of Slam with the Order of the Seaman, Third Class, because he is the only man in the world who cannot dance and does not harbor the delusion that he can.

Jessica seemed glad to see your correspondent. She is sufficiently comely. It was noticeable that she wore the conventional bobbed hair, the conventional knee length skirt which your correspondent now understands is doomed, and smoked the conventional fag.

"Anything on your hip?" she inquired, brusquely.

Your correspondent examined his hip.

"No," he replied. "Was there anything there?"

Jessica laughed. She howled.

"How's the old cakeater, anyway?" she asked.

"I should love a piece," your correspondent retorted. Cake was not over plentiful in Labrador.

"Let's shake a leg," suggested Jessica.

Girls used to call a leg a limb, but Jessica was always one to call a spade a shovel. It developed that she desired your correspondent to dance.

"Oh, you want me to trip the light, fantastic toe," your correspondent said, not unplayfully.

The music started and I suggested a gavotte.

"A gawhat?" Jessica asked.

"A gavotte," I repeated. "There is dignity and poise in a gavotte."

"Suit yourself," Jessica said, "but I'm going to do the Chicago if they don't stop me. Come on!"

I was about to grasp Jessica according to the method I had learned in dancing school when I was not a little startled to find she had grasped me. I placed my right arm about her waist. And then I knew why I had met so many former corset manufacturers begging in the subway. We danced, as they term it.

Music Leads Sinful Life.

"By all the rules of Miss Frothingham's dancing class, in which you and I gained our insight into the terpsichorean art," I told Jessica, "we ought to be a foot apart at this very minute, and here we are, making the Siamese twins look like distant relatives. How do you explain it?"

"I give up," said Jessica. "How do you?"

There I was with Jessica's extremely beautiful map so close to mine that I could hear her tonsils. A soft, blonde, perfumed curl brushed my cheek and got in my eye. I thrilled.

"Get that hair out of my eye," I said.

The music played jazz. It sounded as if a respectable tune had given itself up to a life of sin or had gone on an outing to a summer amusement park and was gazing at itself in one of those fantastic looking glasses that make your face look funnier than it is.

It was a familiar tune, and when I got

time I recognized it. It was William Tell's overture, but he would never have recognized it, because it was so much improved. It was weird, haunting and entrancing, and I don't know what made me do it, but I seized Jessica even more firmly than I had been seizing her and said: "I am going to marry you!"

This, mark you, was on my first night back from Labrador.

Just then the first violin, who also acted as referee, shouted "Break!" and the gong rang. All the flappers and cakeaters unclenched and untangled themselves, and Jessica and I retired to our corners, and

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